GERMANY REVISITED

* How they live
* Blowings-up
* "Denazification"
* What we ought to do

By

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I—CONDITIONS

I

FOOD AND HEALTH

I VISITED GERMANY for a fortnight during August, with two M.P.'s, Dick Stokes and Nigel Birch. The time was short, and my main object was to investigate the new Frankfurt set-up, and to study such questions as import-export and currency reform; but of course I could hardly avoid making some attempt, in a very sketchy way indeed, to compare general living conditions with what I had found there during my previous visit last October and November. I should like to make a brief report.

My first impression was of a quite considerable improvement; but experienced British observers told me, for the most part, that I was mistaken, and that the weather was deceiving me. The warning was necessary, for I remembered how entrancing even the Naples slums had looked under a blazing sky; and when you see naked little children browner than Indians you have to look twice before you notice their spindly legs, and you can put down the absence of shoes, as you can't in winter, to a preference for barefootedness. Even Cologne, most lamentable of cities, doesn't frighten you in August: the sun almost makes a Pompeii of it.

But very soon you find that, after nearly a year, there has been little change in the physical circumstances of the people. The food situation had reached what is called rock-bottom—though there appears to be no rock-bottom for human endurance—during the Spring and early Summer, when rations for the normal consumer of about 1,000 calories or even considerably less were common, and in one large city (or so I was assured by a German friend whom I had learned to trust) the figure actually fell, during an awful fortnight at the end of March and beginning of April, to three hundred. I quote this statement with all reserve. Now, however, rations were again climbing towards, and in some places reaching, the 1,550 calorie level—which, it should be remembered, we thought quite shameful two years ago, when we talked of reaching 1,800, as a stage on the road to 2,000, in a matter of months. It is also worth recalling that a diet of 1,000 calories is described by Sir Jack Drummond, formerly scientific adviser to the Ministry of Food, as "starvation."
In spite of the improvement, however, this was the day's diet, for each of a family of six, in the first bunker cabin I visited: breakfast—two slices of bread and jam, ersatz coffee and skim milk; dinner—three small potatoes with vinegar, a cup of skim milk; supper—one and a half herrings, two slices of dry bread, skim milk. The bread was of horrible quality, and there was no butter or margarine. But this was, I think, rather unusually bad, and should not be taken as typical.

I will put down, for what it is worth, my own estimate of how the non-farm population in the British zone is eating. I should say, then, that 10 per cent., including many of the old, the sick and the war widows, are starving—not, except in an odd case or two, starving to death, for that takes an unconscionable time, but starving as you and I understand the word: that for 25 per cent. the diet is a daily experience of dull and devitalising misery: that 55 per cent. “get through” on varying degrees of austerity: and that the remaining 10 per cent. enjoy anything from reasonable comfort to gross luxury. This estimate is, of course, nothing but an impression and can have no statistical validity; but I put it to a high official of our Food and Agriculture Division, a welfare officer attached to C.C.G., and a British Red Cross worker, and they all substantially agreed with me.

Why is really acute starvation less widespread than you would expect? For two reasons. First, family rations are shared; but it will be realized that while this means that “normal consumers” get a little more, it also means that what are called “workers”—the housewife is not regarded as such—get less. One of the two or three highest British officials in the zone committed himself to the statement that not more than 5 per cent. of the population was capable of doing a real day’s work, and that in several industries the working capacity was as low as 25 per cent. Secondly, a high percentage get some sort of supplement from the black or grey markets, or by “compensation.” But it is important to bear in mind that the amount of extra food so obtainable is trifling (except for the rich), especially now that goods for barter and accumulated marks are giving out. I visited in the Kölnerstrasse at Düsseldorf a gentle young woman of 34, who was living in a wretched room there with her child of three. She appeared to be in the middle stage of starvation, and the child complained of pains in the chest. Her husband—“he was always so well”—had suddenly, six months before, contracted t.b. of the larynx, and was now in a hospital for incurables. His throat was so painful that she wished him
dead, but all she could do was to buy fresh fruit to relieve its dryness. Her income was 114 marks a month. The rent was 30 marks. She had just bought seven small, green, hard-looking pears on the black market, and was taking them to her husband that afternoon: they had cost her two and a half marks apiece. Work it out for yourself, and you will find that a pear a day would exhaust her entire income, and leave nothing for food or anything else for herself and the child.

While we were talking the child came in, snatched at one of the pears and buried her teeth in it. After a horrifying cry—"No, no, it's for your father"—her mother got it away; then—I don't know how to describe the struggle between husband and child that you could see in her face, but it was something very brief and tired—she gave it a smaller one.

In a very different milieu, the Burgomaster of Hamburg told me that his net monthly income, which is as high as any that can be legitimately earned in Germany even by the richest business men, was almost exactly equivalent to the price of three and a half pounds of butter on the black market.

As to health, the infant mortality rate is on the whole surprisingly good in the circumstances: during December, January and February it had increased by about 25 per cent., but by May had dropped to a figure almost identical with what it had been when I left in November, namely rather less than double ours. The reason is, I am told, first, that in spite of the ever increasing demoralisation mothers are still mothers, and secondly that invaluable assistance has been received from British, Swedish and other sources. With tuberculosis the position is very different. I had a look at the Hamburg statistics: they show 66 per cent. more cases on the register at the end of 1946 than at the end of 1945, with an estimated further increase of 25 per cent. (on the end of 1946 figure) by the end of the present year. I don't know how reliable these figures may be; they are perhaps inflated by some change in the method of registration, while many cases, on the other hand, no doubt escape registration altogether. In any event, I am convinced by my own observation that the account recently published in the Manchester Guardian is accurate, that the disease is increasing hideously, and that unless decisive measures are taken there will be such a plague of deaths from this cause in a few years' time as will shock the conscience of what is called the civilised world.

I made one or two special enquiries about health in the City of Hamburg. The British Public Health official at the moment
in charge reported that new cases of hunger oedema admitted to hospital in each of the months May, June and July averaged more than 400, and that while the figure was on paper lower than the corresponding one for 1946 it was really much higher, since there was now a stricter criterion as to what could and what could not be properly described as hunger oedema. This figure must, of course, be multiplied very many times to give the total of all cases, hospitalised, privately treated and unknown. I was also handed a statement by Dr. D. Lennox, of our Public Health Branch. This states that “starvation oedema . . . shows a steady rise during the period” of Spring and early Summer: that 75 per cent. of the whole Hamburg population are “definitely below par”; and that 150,000 are “dangerously below par.” “The effect of this overall situation . . . .” comments Dr. Lennox “shows itself in a marked reduction of capacity for work . . . . It has been stated that a worker in Hamburg is only doing a third of a normal day’s work. Probably a half would be a more conservative statement.”

So much for official information. I have reason to believe, however, that a sample—some hundreds—of the Hamburg population has recently been surveyed under expert British auspices: that the incomes of those examined ranged from nothing to 4,000 marks a family a month; that 50 per cent. showed loss of weight, 20 per cent. severe, the average being seven kilograms below normal; that 27 per cent. exhibited pallor and 19 per cent. clinical thinness (5 per cent. of high degree): that chronic fatigue was prevalent, mental alertness diminishing, and ability to work on the steady decline: and that an alarmingly high percentage had a history of oedema. There is some mystery about this report, of which I was not allowed to see a copy: it could not be relied upon, I was told, as the sample was too small, some of the people had failed to present themselves for examination, there was no proper basis of comparison for weights, and so on. Very well: take the figures, if you wish, as nothing but a mere pointer to the position. Or ignore them altogether, and rely on Dr. Lennox, who is explicit enough.
II

CLOTHES AND HOUSES

If I say that the shoe shortage is less desperate than when I was in Germany last year I fear that I may give a dangerously misleading impression; for there is still a "misery of boots" quite unimaginable by anyone who hasn't seen it, and I understand that the mysterious Hamburg survey found that 30 per cent. of those examined either had no shoes at all or some sort of ruined footwear that was "quite unweatherproof." Still, the improvement has been considerable. In Schleswig Holstein, for instance, it is estimated that only 300,000 or 400,000 children will be without reasonable shoes this winter, as against say three-quarters of a million last; and quite often you heard mothers say, as you never heard them say in November, "We've been promised a coupon for children's shoes in a month or so."

Apart, however, from shoes and possibly one or two other things, the supply of consumer goods for the ordinary population is well below the level, already wretched beyond belief, to which it had fallen by last November—or that was my impression, for I made no statistical comparison. This is partly due to the priority supply of such miserable quantities as there are to the very few "special classes" such as miners, railwaymen and the like; and meanwhile the last household reserves have been wearing out. People sometimes say that the German public must have been pretty well stocked up at the end of the war, if only with loot from the occupied countries. They ought to go and have a look at Cologne, and ask themselves how much could have survived there. Of the 5,500,000 pre-war dwelling units in the British zone 1,600,000 were totally destroyed or irreparably damaged, and another 1,400,000 damaged but capable of repair; in the British sector of Berlin only 27,966 were undamaged out of a total of 298,477. A great number of people were bombed out three, four, or five times. As to loot, that cuts both ways: millions of the expellees in our zone came without a table, a chair, a pot, a pan, a knife, a fork, a glass, a change of clothes or anything but what they could gather together in half an hour and carry with them; and even that was often stolen before they reached the frontier.

Let me give, at random, a few official statistics for the supply of certain articles to the ordinary public—to everyone, that is to say, except the "special classes." For Dortmund, with a
population of 450,000, no coupons at all were allocated in May, June or July for men’s suits, women’s underwear, or baby linen. (It should be explained that you can’t buy anything of the kind without a coupon—nor, sometimes, with one.) In Bielefeld (population 113,454) the position was the same. In Herford (population 49,000) the following were distributed during this period: 20 working jackets and 34 working trousers for men; 10 slips, 10 nightgowns, 34 brassières and 15 knickers for women; 112 vests, 522 napkins, 386 “muslin napkins,” and 10 small sheets for babies. Jülich is an almost completely ruined town with a population of a little under 50,000, including 665 infants up to 1 and 3,474 children from 1 to 6. During the first quarter of 1947 for children from 1 to 3 there were 19 coats, 45 knickers and 70 stockings, and for the infants 10 coatées, 13 panties, 537 vests, 230 inner napkins, and 43 outer napkins. In Iserlohn, with a population of 43,772, including 8,521 expellees from the East, the following coupons were distributed for the eight months from January 1st to August 29th: for men—18 suits, 5 overcoats, 30 jackets, 64 trousers; for women—254 dresses, 1 coat, 46 vests, 17 nightdresses, 103 brassières, 14 corsets, 28 knickers, 32 petticoats. In Düsseldorf, with a population of 422,000 (including about 27,000 children from 1 to 6), the following were allocated during the first quarter of 1947: 155 men’s suits, 112 men’s vests, 267 men’s pants, 118 women’s knickers, no boys’ winter coats, no girls’ vests or knickers, 3 handkerchiefs; and 140 coats, 200 knickers, and 377 stockings for children from 1 to 3. I believe I am also right in saying that the figure of 155 men’s suits stands for the whole period from the beginning of the year till August 31st, and that the number of applicants for them is 60,000.

No electric light bulbs are available for the general population. This is intolerable, as so many rooms are boarded up and without natural light, even by day. I refrain from giving the fantastic figures for such things as drinking glasses, plates, washbasins, etc., divided into the population—one a year for every two inhabitants, one a year for every seven, one a year for every 150, one table or chair a year for every 100 refugees, and so on. Brooms, brushes and shaving brushes do not exist at all. Toothbrushes are only for miners. During the last few months the supply of soap to the civilian population has been failing, and Dick Stokes reported from Essen that there had been none there (except, I imagine, for the special classes) for four weeks. School furniture covers only about 7 per cent. of the demand.
According to an official German statement from Minden, only every third person who dies can be buried in a coffin.

Finally, housing. Is it better or worse? The merest fraction better, you might think, if you judged from the number of "dwelling units," wretched and comparatively negligible though it is, that have been repaired during the last few months. Worse, said a Regional Commissioner particularly concerned with this question, for the deterioration, he said, had outstripped the anyhow quite trifling improvement. For my own part I could see little change, one way or the other. There were the same bunkers, with more or less the same number of more or less the same people; the same cellars—eight inhabitants in one of them, including an idiot. A real effort has been made to rehouse the special classes, and that explains why things are considerably better in parts of the Ruhr; but in Düsseldorf there were on July 1st this year 3,040 homeless and 13,000 in cellars, bunkers and the like, as against 3,018 and 13,500 on November 1st 1946. Meanwhile, preparations for a British Leave Centre at Düsseldorf (a project that some of us were trying 'to kill last autumn) are in full swing. The remaining inhabitants have been ordered to leave the district, which has been encircled with barbed wire. 360 German building workers have been asked for; there are to be 80 bungalows; and the Academy, an enormous building, is to be repaired. The very large quantity of building materials required will no doubt be drawn from an Army pool, but they are building materials none the less. I was also given (by a C.C.G. expert, not a German) the result of a survey which had just been completed in the same city. This showed that if British officials would sleep two together in very large rooms existing messes could accommodate another 460—and this would mean comfortable quarters for at least 600 Germans. But the proposal could not be sanctioned, on the ground that when people joined the C.C.G. single rooms were guaranteed.

The worst place I visited, I think, was a house in the suburbs of Düsseldorf. 32 people were living there. Every room was disgusting, but the most disgusting was one at the top. A girl, who was some sort of night-nurse, was trying to sleep in that tiny and lamentable attic, which sweated and stank with the heat. The mother was from Danzig: she had lost two of her children there, after the Russians came, from what she called hunger typhus, and a third had died at Flensburg. She possessed nothing; she had given almost her last garment to the girl on the bed. In a grisly passage outside, which appeared to serve as
a sort of drawing room, three old women were sitting in the dark. As I stood talking to them a lot of plaster came tumbling down. The woman from Danzig swept it up in a pan.

The woman from Danzig was not the only woman who had cried that morning. In a little shack, with a few square feet of dried up garden, I found two sisters. One of them—I swear I am not exaggerating—looked eighty, though she was only forty-five. I think I have never seen anyone, outside a hospital or a camp for expellees, look so thin and ill. “She works too hard” said her sister; “she works from morning till night.” Her son, it appeared, was a prisoner of war. I selfishly hoped she would tell me he was in Russia or France; but no, he was one of ours—in the Middle East. He had been a soldier for five years, and during all that time she had seen him only once. I told her that he would certainly be home by the end of 1948. “That will be six years” she said. Shortly after my return to England I received the Prime Minister’s reply to the “Save Europe Now” memorial praying for a speedier repatriation of prisoners of war. Our own industrial needs, said Mr. Attlee in effect, were paramount, and our justification for retaining the labour of these men was that only in this way could “the Germans” make practical reparation for the devastation “they” had wrought. Well, there are different opinions about reparation, and equally honourable men may hold opposing ones; but by what moral law, I take leave to ask, is special suffering imposed on that forgotten and no doubt quite “innocent” woman in the Diisseldorff shack—merely because it was her son who happened to be captured?
III

EXPELLEES AND REFUGEES

What makes the housing problem even more hopeless than it might otherwise be is the continuing influx of refugees and expellees. Not a thing has changed in that awful bunker by Hamburg station: there they were, still milling about with their sticks and their bundles, for all the world as if they were the very same people I had talked to not far short of a year ago. But we were to find something even worse. After lunch one day at the Regional Commissioner’s in Hanover we were taken a two hour drive to a town called Uelzen. At a dreadful camp there, a place of misery and despair, wreckage comes flooding in from Polish-occupied Germany and the Russian zone. We no longer accept expellees from the new Poland: so the Poles just expel them into the Russian zone, as close as possible to our frontier, and thence they escape to us. Others can’t stand the life, and come of their own free will. Fugitives from the Russian zone are driven by fear of conscription in the uranium mines, or (some say) of conscription in the Russian army, or just by fear. I had read half a dozen lines about this uranium mine business on the back page of an English newspaper: here you saw it in terms of flesh and blood.

Heinz K...., a six-foot skeleton of 21—we were able to rout out a photographer and take a record—had been a prisoner of war at Kharkov for a couple of years. There had been 1,200 of them at Kharkov, and every week eight to twelve of them had died. (I am not vouching for the accuracy of any of this: I am merely repeating exactly what we were told.) It was at Kharkov that the man had become the skeleton. From Kharkov he had been sent to Dresden, where, on March 6th, every unmarried man from 17 to 45 had had to register. The purpose or purposes of this registration I do not know; but shortly afterwards K.... was in a uranium mine—at Johanngeorgenstadt in the Erzgebirge. The food was worse than at Kharkov. He worked underground for 8½ hours a day and for 7 days a week, loading trucks and holding the drill by arrangement with a friend, as he was too weak to be a “striker.” A C.C.G. official, of our party from Hanover, gave him some cigarettes: I, having nothing, could only tell him to hope.

Hans N.... had been a prisoner of war at Kiev till December 1946. He had worked in a coal mine, and had been released
“because he was undernourished.” From February 3rd to July 25th this year he had been in a G.P.U. prison at Magdeburg—the address was Porsestrasse 22. A strong light glared in his cell day and night. Three times every 24 hours he was interrogated for a two hour stretch by a Russian officer, who brandished a revolver and asked such questions as “Why did you fight against the Russians?” “How many did you kill?” This went on for two or three days; then there was a pause; then it started all over again. The reason: that he had been in the Waffen S.S. I shall have something to say about that presently. Now, having escaped from Magdeburg, he will no doubt be denazified or Spruchkammerd or whatever it may be by us.

A woman of 43, whose name I did not get, was a German Balt, who had been moved down by the Nazis to the Polish Corridor. She had had two daughters, one of whom had disappeared. She had been a prisoner of the Poles, and had fled to the Russian zone in May. At the beginning of August the Russians had tried to take away her second daughter, a girl of 17½. They had called at the house and put her on a lorry, presumably for forced labour. The girl had escaped, and the mother had fled with her to the British zone. “What are we to do with her?” said a camp official in English. “If we don’t send her back we shall have another thousand tomorrow.” I think the woman understood: her eyes were dreadful.

A young man told a muddled story of how he had been on parole from a prison or prison camp and had seen his wife, mother and child put up against a wall and shot in Polish-occupied Germany. He was obviously half mad, and I didn’t believe his story, which didn’t make sense; but a C.C.G. official told us that stories of this kind, though perhaps exaggerated, were so persistent that something pretty horrible must be going on in Polish-occupied Germany.

Rudolf M. . . . was 22. A native of Polish-occupied Silesia, he had been taken prisoner in March 1945 by the Russians in East Prussia and sent to a prisoner of war camp of 30,000 in the Urals. There he worked in a tank factory for ten hours a day and for seven days a week. He had been brought on August 5th to Frankfurt on the Oder, and told that he was going to a rest camp; but he discovered that he was being drafted to a uranium mine in Saxony, and escaped. He was filthy and his clothes were shocking; he had come barefoot all the way.

Worst of all was Werner M. . . . , who was 28 and looked
70. He was a Red Cross man who had been taken prisoner by the Russians at Briansk in February 1943 and made to work for a month in the Russian front line. Thence he had been sent to the lead and copper mines in the Urals—his camp was the same as Rudolf M . . . . 's. He had mined for two years and carried for another two. He had worked for ten hours a day and seven days a week; his job had been to carry an 80 lb. load, in a wicker basket on his back, up a ladder from ledge to ledge. He made four journeys, up and down, every day. Think about it for a moment, please; this went on, day after day, not for a week or a month but for a couple of years. Dick Stokes cross-examined him about the type of ladder, and we asked a doctor whether the load was physically possible: in the end, we were convinced that his story was true. His appearance was ghastly: he was covered with sores, and had water on the knee from malnutrition. We took a photograph. We asked the doctor whether his appearance indicated any particular disease. No, he replied, it was due to starvation, heart, and “psychological misery common among refugees.”

But I’m not sure, after all, that he was the worst. In a large straw-strewn hut a little old woman, dressed in black, was sitting on the floor against the wall. She was from Stolp in Pomerania. Her husband had been “taken” by the Russians in 1945—but came back and died two days later. On June 8th she had been expelled by the Poles to the Russian zone. She kept winding and unwinding a little coil of string.

“And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.”
IV

THE DREAMS OF HIS YOUTH

If there has been little change in the physical circumstances of the German people, morality has gravely declined. Karl Arnold, the Minister President of North Rhine-Westphalia and a Christian Democrat of the finest type—it is said, incidentally, that he refuses to supplement his rations from any not strictly legal source—spoke to us with a good man’s agony of his country’s plight. “We are living,” he said, “in a narrower and narrower circle; the normal is abnormal and the abnormal normal; demoralization in public and private economic life has grown appallingly; and just below the surface is anarchy.” Burgomaster Brauer of Hamburg, who supported the illegal fight against Hitler as an American citizen from the United States and then returned to Germany and took up his German nationality again in order to help his country, spoke of the frightful increase in juvenile delinquency, which he described as four times normal, and mentioned that on a single day during the freeze-up 17,000 men stole coal from a single dump. A German friend of mine in a high position at Düsseldorf said that civil servants, who couldn’t work on their rations and couldn’t “compensate”—that is to say, get extras by doing special jobs of work—must almost necessarily become corrupt. The wife of one of the highest British officials, very humane and what is half-wittedly called “pro-German,” said that servants would no longer work willingly and that stealing was rampant. It was, indeed, the moral illness, and not the physical catastrophe, which the best people everywhere, British and Germans alike, most insistently stressed.

I hope I shall not be suspected, when I write this, of implying some special criticism of Germans as such. Given the ruined economy, the starvation rations, the famine in things for the body and things for the home; given the failure, month after month and year after year (our failure, or, if you will, the quadripartite failure) to reform the currency—then an ever bigger and bigger black market, a progressively increasing acceptance of all that is implied by sauvé qui peut, was inevitable: inevitable in Germany, but inevitable also in any other country of the modern world. Add the disastrous expellees, flooding in to make the crowded ruins just a little more intolerable; add the moral nightmare called denazification; add the threat, first
against this factory and then against that, to filch, to dismantle and to destroy; add the total impotence of the Germans, bound hand and foot, to plan effectively for their own salvation; add, at last, our common original sin of human selfishness—and can you wonder at the result?

Yet, even so, the decline need not have been so rapid if at any time during these last two years or more the Germans, and in particular the German youth, could have seen, at the end of a tunnel no matter how long and how dark, a glimmer of the sun.

During my previous visit it was the cry of a University student—“for God’s sake don’t make us Nazis”—which distressed me more than the semi-starvation, the schoolchildren’s shoes, and the underground cellars with their four, five, or nine inhabitants. And now once again this August it was an encounter with a young German in, I suppose, the early twenties, which brought home to me most forcibly the essential horror of life in Germany today, and how gravely it threatens the future not only of Germany but of the world.

My friend is a young Socialist intellectual, and a member of his Landtag. He first wrote to me round about the Christmas of 1945. We had had a great meeting at the Albert Hall on behalf of “Save Europe Now,” at which I had been one of the speakers. He wrote to say that the whole group of young Socialists to which he belonged had been profoundly moved by the fact that it was a Jew who, so soon after the end of the war, was pleading on behalf of starving Germans. “We pledge ourselves,” he wrote, “to play our part in building up, to the best of our ability, a peaceful Germany and a peaceful world.”

That was the beginning of I will not say a friendship—for our contacts were too sporadic for that—but of a relationship based on genuine mutual understanding. The boy wrote to me from time to time: I saw him once or twice during my tour of Germany last year: and he was in England for a short visit in the late winter. He appealed to me as a man of great intellectual and spiritual gifts. His mastery of English was almost perfect, and his knowledge of modern English literature in some respects superior to mine. Though he was not a “believer,” his socialism was essentially of the religious kind: he really understood what the modern struggle is about. Best of all, his letters and his conversation expressed a sober and realistic optimism. He knew very well what frightful difficulties Germany, and in particular the German youth, were up against: but he was determined that they should be surmounted, not primarily for
the sake of himself or even of Germany, but for the sake of human well-being.

I found myself, during this recent visit, in the town in which he lived, and I asked him to come and see me at a room put at my disposal by the Deputy Regional Commissioner. As he came in and I rose to welcome him, I suddenly felt miserable and afraid. For this was not the boy I had known—this was someone different, someone, almost, from another world. Impressions of this kind are almost impossible to convey, and I have no professional skill in the use of words. If I say that he was less carefully dressed than before—making rather the impression of a man in a West End club without a tie—or that he looked grey and thin and ill, or that he smiled with difficulty, that would all be true: but the sense I had was of something over and above all that—the sense of someone who was living, day by day and hour by hour and minute by minute, with a horror inside from which he couldn’t escape.

I asked him at once what the matter was. He told me that he was “rather ill”—I think he suspected t.b. and I imagine that he was right. But before long the real trouble emerged and it was not physical but spiritual. He spoke of the frightful corruption which was closing in, ever more narrowly, from every side: he said that decency, humanity, honesty, honour—all were vanishing: he talked about the black market, the grey market, barter, “compensation,” prostitution for cigarettes, the cold last winter, the frightful hunger this spring—but always, again and again, of the ever more rapid disappearance of what we call Christian morality. And then he said, not defiantly, not—far from it—to attack me as a member of the occupying Power, but with a kind of dead misery and despair: “I am no good any longer: I have lost all power to feel as I felt when I used to write and talk to you: the very possibility of making anything decent out of Germany, out of Germany as it has become, has vanished.”

Well, that was that. I do not say that my friend is typical of German youth as a whole. But I judge from my correspondence that a rapidly increasing number of the most idealistic, most intelligent and most politically conscious young people feel as he feels; and in so far as we have helped to produce this feeling we have something on our conscience with which we shall not find it easy to live in the years to come. “Tell him” says Schiller in Don Carlos “that he must give heed to the dreams of his youth, if he wants to become a man.” But what if, already in youth, the dreams have gone?
II—WAR AND PEACE

I

DEMONTAGE

§ (1) KIEL

Wherever you go in Germany you hear a formerly unfamiliar word. If food and shoes and fuel are what worry the man in the street, or rather the woman in the cellar, it is something rather more outré which, within five minutes of your meeting them, will bring a note of irony or reproach or cynicism or downright blazing anger into the conversation of whoever it is, of the governmental or employer or trade union type, that you may happen to be interviewing. There are at least three main varieties of the thing, and several subdivisions of each; but Germans without exception use the comprehensive "démontage," sometimes for convenience and sometimes from ignorance, to cover the lot. And it isn't a bad word, either. The Concise Oxford French Dictionary translates it "taking to pieces, taking down, removing." That does in fact cover pretty nearly everything involved, except dynamiting and filching blueprints.

The three main varieties of démontage are, first, disarmament: second, the dismantling of factories for reparation: third, the acquisition of trade secrets, recipes, "know-hows," key machines and the like under what is known as "T force" procedure. Of the three, disarmament is the most spectacular and "T force" the meanest. Disarmament is also the most commonly defended. I should like to give an example of it.

It is proposed to blow up the deep-water wharves at Kiel. This means, of course, the destruction of the harbour, the ruin of the town, and a still further instalment of damnation for Land Schleswig Holstein, of which Kiel is the capital.

The normal population of Schleswig Holstein has been roughly doubled by the influx of about a million and a quarter expellees, victims of the Potsdam iniquity. It is said that in the earlier waves no more than 3 or 4 per cent. were able-bodied males. I described what they looked like and how they lived after my return
from Germany in the late autumn of 1946; and I was told, when I enquired about them this August at Kiel, that there had in the meantime been little change. Most of them now had a wooden bunk, whereas formerly they had slept on stretchers or the floor, and some arrangements had been made for schooling in the camps; but otherwise they are just as they were ten months ago, without strength, without possessions, without happiness, without hope. I have a booklet before me with photographs of some of these people as they arrived from Pomerania, Brandenburg and Silesia, and I tell you that there is no difference, literally no difference at all, between these photographs and the photographs (other than those of heaped-up bones) that were taken in Belsen and Buchenwald after the liberation. And now a new wave of refugees is flooding in; not less than 700 a week—this was the specially Conservative estimate given us by de Crespigny, the Regional Commissioner—mostly in flight from the Russian zone and the terror aroused there by the recent registration. You can form some sort of idea of what all this means for the Schleswig Holstein economy when you learn that a full third of the budget is spent on expellees and refugees.

The Germans of Schleswig Holstein, encouraged by some of the finest members of the Control Commission, have been preparing plans for the establishment on the quay-side of a whole series of light industries, which would at least do something to save the town and the province from hopeless decay. The raw materials would be brought in, and the products got away, by sea—if there is a harbour, for on that the whole project must depend. But nothing can be done, though it is two and a half years since the war ended and nearly a year since I was given some details of the scheme; for if present plans hold good the very basis of the thing, in the quite literal sense, is to be dynamited to hell. De Crespigny took us round the harbour in his launch on a blazing August day, and it seemed incredible that rational human beings, after defeating one piece of wickedness, were now cold-bloodedly proposing to commit another. And de Crespigny showed us something else. On the quay-side down at Eckernförde there are a whole series of buildings—offices, lecture rooms and the like—which were used in connection with the naval installations, but mostly for administrative and educational purposes. The shortage of accommodation, with the population almost doubled and Kiel half ruined, can easily be imagined even by people who haven’t been there. One of the Eckernförde buildings, which are in the main of quite light construction, is big enough to accommodate a thousand people,
and the decent and humane Englishmen who are in charge of our administration there would like to convert it into a hospital or use it for housing refugees. Other of these buildings could serve as schools, of which the town is desperately short, or as institutions for the treatment of delinquency, which is increasing horribly. But no: if present plans hold—I repeat the phrase, for public pressure might, I suppose, still compel a change—the buildings are to be dynamited with the quays. No childish nonsense, you will notice, about beating swords into ploughshares. I hasten to add that it is of wharves and buildings and not of naval installations that I am speaking.

I shall be told that Kiel was a foul place with a foul purpose. I always thought so; I thought so as a young boy when the Kaiser Wilhelm, then a greatly respected figure, was being entertained by our nobility at Cowes. But the swords of which Isaiah and Micah wrote were foul things also. And what precisely, one may ask, is the object of this destruction? Is it “to teach them a lesson”? A distinguished civil servant, with whom, I regret to say, I had a row about it over lunch the other day, thought that this was the idea, and a very good one too: the morality he preached at me was the morality in vogue among my ancestors before Micah and Isaiah came to rebuke them. “Teach them a lesson!” Believe me, it doesn’t work that way. The hour those quays go up in smoke it will not be love of peace or a realisation of where war leads or a contempt for power and force that will be born in the hearts of the onlookers: it will be a lust for retaliation, and a confirmed belief in violence, and that consciousness of being outraged which sooner or later brings all who suffer it, whether babies or nations, into hateful opposition to the world. But I say that every child schooled in one of those Eckernförde buildings, every expellee nursed back to health, every youth rescued from a life of immorality and crime, would be a bulwark and apostle of peace.

Or are they essential perhaps, these dynamitings, in the interests of security? The extraordinary thing is that while the military, when you talk to them, seem as often as not of unquestionable intelligence, so many of their policies are plain lunacy. Ignore the fact that the next war, if God forbid it comes, will be an affair of atoms and bacteria and all the other horrors humanity is now so busily engaged in manufacturing. Ignore the further fact that the enemies of the last war are not necessarily the enemies of the next—remember Frederick the Great, or, as late as 1914-1918, Italy and Japan. Even so, when exactly is Germany expected to
make war on us? During the next few years? Go and have a
look at the place, and you will have your answer. But if in
fifteen or twenty or fifty years’ time, then of two things one:
either we shall be in occupation, and in that event battleships and
torpedoes will be out of the question, or we shan’t, and in that
event what can we do to prevent, not only the building of battleships and
torpedoes, but the rebuilding of the harbour as well? It’s as simple as that. Men will always do what they want to do,
unless you have both the will and the power to prevent them; and you can never tell in advance whether you will have either.
The only hope for goodness is that the things men want to do will
not be evil things; and the only disarmament worth having is, in
the long run, the disarming of men’s hearts.

§ (2) KRUPP AND BLOHM AND VOSS

The conquerors’ mania for destruction—a stigma, whatever its
rationalising motive, of a malady with which every psychologist
will be familiar—is not to be satisfied by the dynamiting of the
harbour at Kiel. Many great buildings in different parts of
Germany—the bricks and mortar, the steel framework, the
gantries—are to be blown up, or rather blown down, directly the
last item of equipment has been dismantled and sent off for
reparations. Or even before. In one case within my knowledge
our “Disarmament” people are threatening our “Reparations,”
and telling them that if there’s any further dilly-dallying the roof
will be brought down on anything that remains.

On August 19th Stokes spent the day at Essen, while I was
looking into housing conditions at Düsseldorf. Stokes is
Managing Director of Ransomes and Rapier, the great engineering
firm, and speaks as an expert. I quote his report:

“I spent the whole day touring the twenty-five sections marked
in red on the map as due for demolition as soon as dismantling has
been completed.

“Krupp is a Category I plant, and by quadripartite agreement
all such plants must be liquidated by the end of June 1948. As the
Disarmament Section was not put to work on the job until
January 1947 time is too short to take the buildings down in an
orderly fashion, so they’ll have to be blown down by local charges.
This will have a shocking effect on the morale of the Esseners,
which is already very low indeed.

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"The Disarmament Team has already removed some 70,000 tons of war material and there are a further 20,000 tons to go. It is the intention, I understand, to destroy each shop with local charges as soon as it is cleared of war and other equipment.

"There are 80,000 tons of ingot steel, much of it stainless, 500 tons of welding rods, and two stores full of cutters and precision guages, all of which constitute real wealth, besides a great number of ingot molds and other valuable material. No evident effort is at present being made to remove any of this, and it looks as if when the buildings come down it will all be buried. This material can be found in shops 12, 47 and 50 among others.

"There appears to be some confusion in the interpretation of instructions concerning demolition. In Appendix A to Z.E.I. 55, pages 1-3, reference is made to cranes of 30 tons and over, on which decision 'is reserved for further consideration.' Instructions shown to me by the Disarmament Team state that shops with craneage of 30 tons and over must be demolished. The common-sense interpretation of this is that bays of any shops carrying 30 ton cranes, two of which working together could give a combined lift of 60 tons, are to be demolished. The Disarmament Section, however, are interpreting it to mean that any shop, regardless of the number of bays, which has a total crane capacity of 30 tons or over is to be pulled down or destroyed.

"In my judgment none of the twenty-five buildings which I saw should be demolished except number 77, which is damaged beyond repair. All the remaining twenty-four could be converted to useful purpose for peace-time industry. To conform to instructions cranes of over 30 ton capacity could be removed and cranes of lighter capacity installed. There is in most instances no real difficulty in destroying the special war-production features in some of the shops, such as gun shrinking pits, turret test beds, etc., without destroying the buildings themselves. The most expensive part of any peace-time building of this character is the steel framework and gantry, and it would be a tremendous help towards getting production of a peaceful character going in Essen if these frameworks were allowed to remain. It is ridiculous to argue that because some of the gantries are capable of carrying very heavy cranes they are a danger; the measure of time required to create a war plant is the time necessary for the production of heavy tools and equipment, not for the production of buildings and gantries.

"I had no time to make a detailed inspection of the condition of foundations, etc., and it may well be that some of the shops are
so badly shaken that major reconstruction would be necessary before they would be safe to work in. Superficially they all looked repairable except 77—I am speaking of the 'red' shops only; the 'blue' shops (second in order for destruction) were not visited except casually.

"There is no practical reason why the majority of the shops should not be put to useful service, e.g. for locomotive production and repair such as is now being undertaken in shop 15, where a tremendous clearance and improvement has been made since I was there in April 1946."

I will pass over the case of Schiess Defries, the machine-tool manufacturers, and will give only one more example in this category. On August 20th I visited the Rheinmetal Bösig works in Stokes' company. We made a general inspection of several great buildings in which the dismantling is almost complete. We formed the conclusion that after removal of the heavy cranes and filling in of the gun mounting test beds and gun shrinking pits the whole could be admirably adapted for general engineering purposes, and would make a very fine excavator shop or locomotive works. But no, the buildings must come down. That they should come down at all at a time like this would be bad enough, even if by such a careful and seemly demolition as would preserve the material and allow it to be stored away for a saner hour; but that they should be blown down—at serious risk, incidentally, to the neighbouring houses, which are only 20 yards from the shops in question—this is vile. The reason, we were told, is shortage of labour and that sacred time-limit of June 30th 1948. Well, Hitler also gave reasons for his vandalism. Is it really impossible for the British working class, which used to talk of international solidarity and is now no longer wholly powerless, to put itself just for a moment in the place of its Düsseldorf brothers, and to feel what they will be feeling when the bangs go off and the buildings come down?

The position at Blohm and Voss in Hamburg is rather different. There the dynamiting has been done: it was done in the summer of last year, and decisive hostility to the British occupation, for the first time, was the result. But certain installations, vital for the repair of the municipal transport system and power stations of Hamburg, were for the moment left. These are now disappearing bit by bit.

A hundred electric riveting machines used in the light metal workshops for carriage repair have been taken in the past few weeks. Application was made in July for the retention of 500
machines in these workshops for the purpose of maintaining municipal transport, but meantime the whole factory has been allocated for reparations and Mr. Blohm understands that dismantling will proceed forthwith. There is still sufficient capacity to repair the Hamburg electricity plant, but machines are being removed one by one, and no one knows when the capacity will be destroyed. As to ship-repairing, the Howaldt floating dock, capable of repairing 16,000 ton ships, was taken to the Piraeus a few weeks ago, and now nothing is left that can deal with anything bigger than 8,000 tons.

A footnote. There are certain bunkers at Wilhelmsburg, a district of Hamburg, which the Burgomaster has been using for offices and stores. They are to be blown up. War potential? Yes: in the event of another war they could be used as air-raid shelters.

II

"DENAZIFICATION"

Among the places we visited were Neuengamme and Recklinghausen, two of the civilian internment camps where members of the organisations declared criminal at Nuremberg are awaiting trial. They are excellently run, within permissible limits, by commandants of great humanity, who cannot be held responsible for such mean regulations as that which limits incoming mail for each prisoner to one letter a week, even if a dozen arrive for him. Many of these men, it must be remembered, have been interned for more than two years, and their families outside are often destitute. But it is the injustice, not of this regulation or that but of the whole procedure, that is so deplorable. Man after man whom we interviewed was clearly guilty of nothing worse than of doing what at the time he considered, and what as things were he was often almost bound to consider, his patriotic duty. Nuremberg is retrospective legislation of the cruellest and most reactionary kind.

In both camps there was great bitterness about something which at first we didn’t understand. In the British zone, it appears, but not in the American, anyone in the Nuremberg categories, unless acquitted, is to be vorbestraft: i.e. entered in the police register
as a man with a criminal record. He is to be vorbestraff even if the punishment is only a moderate fine or a short term of imprisonment, which, in view of the years already served, commonly means release. The young fellow we interviewed, who joined the Waffen S.S. in pretty much the spirit in which an Englishman might have joined the Guards, will become, at any rate for some considerable period, a stigmatised criminal. I say nothing of the fact that every one of these young men considers himself, and some of them not without cause, to have been unjustifiably excluded from the Sholto Douglas youth amnesty.

My reference to the Waffen S.S. and the Guards (whose conduct I am not for a moment comparing) will no doubt be misunderstood. A writer in the Press has suggested that I am “ready to forget many things”, including unspeakable atrocities committed by members of the Waffen S.S. and other Nazi organisations. Often in my nightmares I have wished I could: just as I have wished that others would remember—those, for instance, who sent the remnant of the gassed and incinerated back to Germany, and the British public that failed to protest against so contemptible an iniquity. But you have to think yourself back into other people’s shoes. Some of these fellows were nine when Hitler came to power; they were 17 when they joined the Waffen S.S.; and they joined it because, in that environment, they thought of it as the corps d’élite of the German army. And remember that no personal participation in atrocities need even be alleged against them. Unless they can prove, and one doesn’t see how, that they didn’t know what was happening, their failure to “resign”—with what chance of survival in times of war?—will mean punishment now in the way described. That they should have had the moral insight which would have prompted them to the sacrifice even of their lives is what everyone must wish; but was it to be expected of them with such a history as theirs?

I wish to add a few sentences about the wider issue of “denazification” in the broadest sense—all this purging, punishing and penalising, this ticketing and categorising of a vast section of the community. Without exception, everyone with whom we spoke—British, Germans, educationists, C.D.U., S.P.D.—was trying to find some way of bringing to a speedy end this hideous process. It destroys efficiency—people shirk important jobs for fear of inciting delation, or even for fear that, if another change occurs they may find themselves in trouble for collaborating with
the British. It poisons the moral atmosphere—you can buy testimonials to your purity on the black market, and can bribe yourself out of penalties with a pound of butter. It fails to achieve its avowed purpose—there are plenty of most undesirable personages in powerful positions. And heaven knows how long the horror will go dragging on. To cope with the situation in Hamburg, 60 or 70 appeal tribunals are required; but only 31 have been set up, and it is extremely difficult to get the necessary personnel. Decent Germans show an increasing reluctance to sit, or to continue sitting, on "denazification" boards, for they do not want to be mixed up in what they regard, and rightly, as a most distasteful business.

That people are genuinely surprised when you talk of the gross and fundamental immorality of "denazification" as such is simply proof that our Western traditions are in rapid decay. How can you eradicate Nazism by what are in effect totalitarian methods? You do not make a man a better democrat by categorising him as a third-class citizen; what you do is to create an atmosphere in which democracy of any kind is impossible. Little wonder that, according to report, some sort of neo-nazism is on the rapid increase in the Universities and elsewhere.

The time has surely come to deal with the question, not by means of some minor modification, but by a return to the liberal principles for which we are supposed to have fought the war. I venture to put forward the following plan for consideration.

Genuine war criminals—of the 3,846 inmates of Recklinghausen only 56 are so classified—should be dealt with as at present (not that I personally believe in retributive punishment, but I am trying to suggest something acceptable). Everyone else should be amnestied and relieved of all disabilities, and the process should be retrospective. A list should be drawn up of certain key positions—managing directors of really big businesses, people in leading positions in education, the Government, the Civil Service, etc.—and those coming up for such positions, as well as those at present holding them, should be "vetted" by a board or boards, the members of which should be carefully selected for their sanity, liberalism and psychological insight. They would consider, not whether a man became a sergeant in the S.S. in such and such a year, or made an ambiguous speech in 1932, but whether he seems now the sort of person likely to help in building up a democratic Germany. In the event of an adverse decision, the only penalty should be the applicant's failure to get the job, and he should be

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permitted in due course to try again. A capital levy, which, following currency reform, is in any event inevitable, would automatically deprive of their wealth men who would use it for reactionary ends.

Combined with the steady establishment in Germany of liberal institutions and above all a liberal atmosphere, instead of the present inverted Nazism, some such method would safeguard democratic freedoms far more effectively than the prevailing insanity, which is creating embittered totalitarians on an appalling scale.

I put this scheme before one of the outstanding leaders of the S.P.D. He hesitated a moment, proposed a trifling amendment, and then, when I pressed him, said “If you were to impose such a scheme on us I should be absolutely delighted—and so would the majority of the S.P.D.” As I was leaving half an hour later he called me back and said: “I think I shall summon up courage and propose it myself.” I mention this conversation because it is often said that we would like to clear up denazification, but that the Germans won’t let us.
III—PROGRAMME

I

I would put the immediate priorities in Germany as (1) an import programme that would raise the rations of normal consumers to 1,800 calories; (2) an end to “denazification”; and (3) a decision, even at this eleventh hour, to abandon dismantling, with a view to substituting for it, in due course, some system of reparations from current production—the total of reparations rising as production rises, but each marginal percentage being lower than the last. These are decisions that could be taken in the combined zone immediately. The third of them might, if properly worked out, be the key to what everybody wants, a rapprochement with France.

But there is another series of measures as urgent as these; indeed failure to carry them through long ago is what largely lies at the root of present German difficulties. As things have developed, however, these must now wait until after the meeting of Foreign Ministers in November. But they ought to be so cut and dried that they may be carried into effect the very moment that meeting is over; whether even so we shall not be too late remains to be seen.

My assumption is that the November meeting will fail to produce agreement for a united Germany, or rather a united rump-Germany, on any acceptable basis. If this all but inevitable failure occurs, it is a matter of life or death for Western civilisation that there should be no more haverings, no more putting off of indispensable reforms until another meeting in another six months and so on and on until the final catastrophe. While every effort should be made to develop trading relations with the Russian complex (including the Russian zone of Germany) on the friendliest basis, the division of Germany, deplorable though it is, must be for the time being accepted. Infinite harm would be done if we failed once again to face an accomplished fact.

The first essential is the ending of the present Frankfurt set-up, and its replacement, in the combined zone plus the French zone if possible, by a Parliament, a Cabinet, and a non-political Civil Service. Frankfurt, bastard of an illegitimate union between the British and American points of view (neither of which would anyhow have met the case), looked sufficiently odd when studied
from the paper documents in London: but its full preposterousness emerged only when we examined it on the spot, first at Minden and then in Frankfurt itself. I pass rapidly over the minor absurdities of a machine that can hardly be said even to creak. As everybody knows, the upshot at Frankfurt has been a C.D.U. Economic Council, an S.P.D. Executive Committee, and a C.D.U. Executive Directorate: which is rather as if we had here a predominantly Labour House of Commons, a Tory Cabinet (not that the Executive Committee is anything like a Cabinet in our sense of the word), and an active Labour politician as the Civil Service head of the Board of Trade. Even without such an anomaly, however, the thing would be internally incoherent. No one can tell you what, in practice rather than on paper, are the real powers of the Economic Council, Executive Committee, and Executive Directors respectively: when I was cross-examining them on this point a dispute arose between a couple of members of these bodies, each of whom was persuaded that the other was wrong. In certain easily foreseeable eventualities there must be a complete stalemate unless the Executive Committee is by-passed: and already the Executive Committee is fighting for its life by collecting round it "functional experts," while the Economic Council (which is at a disadvantage with the Executive Committee owing to its rarer meetings) is forming up into a series of sub-committees to sit in more or less permanent session. Apart from this interior chaos, the German administration is without real responsibility, for the ordinances of the Economic Council are subject to review and approval by the British and Americans, with their parallel and proliferating organisation. Every German agency, or ministry, is paralleled by an Anglo-American control group, and each of the latter is furnished with a British and American chairman, who take the job on in turns. Over and above the bipartite control groups are bipartite panels in Berlin. These groups and panels will be merged, as soon as the move to Frankfurt is complete, into single organisations, combined to form the bipartite control office; and this will itself do the day by day work of the bipartite board—namely Robertson and Clay. I hardly dare to add that the Zonal Advisory Committee continues to function in the British zone, and the Laenderrat in the American—or that the latter has its own Economic Committee.

But these are minor matters. The crucial point is that the Germans at Frankfurt have no power whatever to enforce anything that they may enact and that the British and Americans may approve. Formally and legally, it is the duty of the Laender to
carry out such instructions as Frankfurt may issue; but if they refuse Frankfurt is in practice impotent—though it can appeal, if you please, to Military Government. This is the crowning absurdity.

The moment, then, the November meeting is over we must be ready to hold elections in the combined zone, and to set up at the centre a German administration that can properly be so described: and an administration as powerful to enforce its will in Bavaria or the Ruhr as ours is in Durham or Kent. To play about with exaggerated federalism would simply be to encourage chaos for the sake of a theory that never had much to be said for it. "The same American influence," I wrote after my former visit to Germany, "will strengthen reactionary tendencies towards a disastrous economic particularism in the Laender, and, more generally, will encourage the stupid federalism which must beat itself in vain against the logic of history. A federal Europe, a hundred times yes: an atomised Germany in an unfederalised Europe, danger and folly." Everything that has happened since, and everything I observed on my recent visit, confirms that warning.
II

If the new German Government in the combined zone is to have some measure of success in dealing with the almost insuperable difficulties that will face it, certain prerequisites are essential. The first is price, taxation and currency reform.

These reforms should be envisaged as parts of a single whole and carried out more or less simultaneously. But it is currency reform that is the most crucial: for a situation is developing which may very soon result in the all but total disappearance of legitimate transactions, and the substitution for them of a system of production and distribution based partly on the barter of goods and services and partly on a demand made effective by the illegitimate possession of vast quantities of marks. Such a system would be morally corrupt, socially unjust, and technically inefficient. It was suggested to me that in the absence of reform what is beginning to be called the "restricted mark" would be wholly out of use in a matter of months except for cinema and railway tickets and the like.

It is currency reform in the narrower sense—the cutting down of actual cash supplies—which the British and Americans should initiate at the earliest possible moment. They should leave it, perhaps, to the new German Government in the combined zone to deal with the problem of total wealth.

But there is a grave danger that the currency reform actually adopted may be of a kind at once socially unjust and incapable of achieving the desired result. If, for instance, nine tenths of existing marks were cancelled, or if all existing marks were cancelled and new currency issued in the ratio of one to ten, nobody would benefit except the black marketeers, who, with great quantities of purchasing power still in their possession even if and when nine tenths of it had been extracted from them, would proceed to buy up all the consumer goods available and so re-start the whole disastrous process. Far better is the plan for two simultaneous marks—the old bad and the new good. On a given day, and on a few following days only, everyone would have the right to exchange a small stated sum of old marks—the same sum in every case, not a sum proportionate to total holdings—for an identical sum of new marks; and the new marks would thereafter alone be legal tender, the old marks being blocked. Similarly, all wages and salaries would, after the given date, be payable in new marks up to a maximum and uniform weekly or monthly sum, any excess being payable in old marks, which would be blocked.
At a later stage, when food and consumer goods were in more adequate supply, would come a capital levy on all forms of wealth—including old marks, the remnant of which might, after that operation, be exchangeable into new marks at a suitable ratio, or even at par.

The urgency of currency reform in the narrower sense cannot possibly be exaggerated. Plans should be ready to bring it into operation the very moment we are free of quadripartite necessities.

The objects of currency reform are two—orderly production and just distribution. Neither will be achieved unless taxation is revised. The present confiscatory system may have fulfilled a useful function in the earlier days of occupation; but now it effectively destroys all initiative on the part of employers and workers alike, and directly encourages every form of illegality. Similarly, the worst anomalies of the price structure, and in particular those resulting from the absurd clash between prices fixed at zonal and prices fixed at quadripartite level, must be amended.

I come to import and export. The present procedure, initiated when the zones were fused, has been a complete failure. I refrain from giving the pitiful figure of Category B imports during the earlier part of the year, or that of exports to date (other than of coal and timber) as recently quoted by Sir Brian Robertson. It is true that imports now show a considerable improvement; but many precious months have been lost, and it will be many more before serious results can accrue.

What is wrong? A series of what I must call minor absurdities (though they are a matter of life or death in the export business) and one overriding incongruity.

In the City of Hamburg there are 600 important exporters. Permission had just been obtained, when I was there, to send—two representatives of them abroad. Samples can be despatched, if at all, only after what were described as “absurd complications”; and while I believe that at least one friendly British official finds a way round the prohibition, no German business man may use airmail. As every letter is censored, the ordinary post is desperately slow: it has been taking five months for an exchange of correspondence between a German business man and his customer in the Argentine. The head of the Anglo-American Joint Export-Import Agency in one of the Laender told me in terms that “the German mail is at present useless for business purposes.” Again, Germans must sell F.O.B., while their customers demand C.I.F. In the absence of a peace treaty German trade-marks and
patents cannot exist. Germans also complain of the mountain of forms that must be filled in for every transaction, but that is a complaint of business men everywhere, and I am unable to say whether a German is worse off than anyone else in this particular respect.

These are what I have called the minor absurdities. But what is finally fatal is the system itself.

The details of every sale must be sanctioned both by the German Export-Import Department of the Land and by the Anglo-American Joint Export-Import Agency. The seller gets marks at the internal price of the goods, but the buyer pays foreign currency (into the Anglo-American pool) at the world price. The German must discover what the world price is, and demand it; if he demands less the deal will be disallowed. But this side of the transaction was until recently of no interest or benefit to him; and as for the marks, as often as not he didn’t want them anyhow, as it would suit him better to “compensate” on the home market. How conceivably could such a system work except in a world of wholly selfless business men—which, after all, is a contradiction in terms? By a recent arrangement 5 per cent. of the net foreign exchange proceeds is allocated to the exporter for his own use, subject to Military Government approval in each case; and now he has to ask himself a nice question—is it better to take advantage of the 5 per cent. or to “compensate”? The whole thing, in any case, is bureaucracy run mad.

All attempts at the detailed control of exports must be abandoned. Given a strong central administration in the combined zone and currency reform, the rest follows: instead of mark payments to the seller, dollar etc. payments by the buyer and foreign control of every transaction, there must be a rate of exchange, a guarantee of scheduled imports and credits over a period of years—and complete freedom for the Germans to get on with the job, subject only to their fulfilling a quarterly export programme, with the sanction of reduced imports if they do not. It must be added that good money will simply be thrown after bad unless the import and credit programme is planned on a really audacious scale.

What it comes to is this. After enacting price, taxation and currency reform, and setting up a central administration with adequate powers, we should in effect clear out and leave the Germans to run their own show: for it was always absurd to imagine that you could administer a great industrial country as if it were a Colony of the Crown. All that need or ought to be left
is an army of occupation—this is essential for more reasons than one—a small intelligence service, a technical inspectorate (charged to prevent any attempt at reconversion to war purposes—I assume the end of dismantling), and possibly a very few really first-rate men at the top, specially selected on a long tenure of service. In addition, if the Germans wished it—as I believe they would—I would not merely retain but even greatly enlarge our splendid education and youth services, for I am sure that they can do immensely valuable work, in the role of friendly advisers, for many years to come.

A final word on the internal political situation. It has been suggested to me that we might succeed in fostering, if we tried, a sort of war-time coalition between the C.D.U., Centrum and S.P.D., on the basis of immediate nationalisation of coal, iron and steel, but nationalisation of nothing else for a stated period of years. I have no idea whether anything of the kind is feasible, and the obvious disadvantage is that you would be starting off the new Germany without the democratic play of fully opposing parties. But the advantages, I am inclined to think, would be greater; and it is possible that if the demand for nationalisation were as weighty as this the Americans would quite speedily succumb.
APPENDIX

I

A LETTER FROM A GERMAN

The following letter, which has just reached me, is such a moving commentary on this pamphlet that, in spite of its expressions of praise, I feel I must publish it and damn the consequences.

W. L. ——
M. GLADBACH,
BRITISH ZONE OF GERMANY.
— STRASSE —

August 26th, 1947.

Dear Mr. Gollancz,

Last night I heard your speech you held in Germany lately by radio-transmission. I was so impressed by it that I can't help writing you a letter and thanking you for your hard and idealistic work you have begun, and which will lead, as I fervently hope, to a fertile movement and may show a way to an understanding between nations, an understanding not in a sense of a commonly used slogan of today.

And this is the only way after my opinion by which our so deep fallen German people can gradually recover. As I learned by your words you visited Germany last month and got a real insight into the present conditions we Germans live under nowadays. I surely need not give you description of all the need and misery prevailing in my country. You know it and many others know it just as well but the fact that moved me so deeply was your courage to rise and to devote yourself to the creation of the movement "Save Europe Now." You can't visualise what for a fire has been kindled in the hearts of thousands of our people when reading and hearing from a man who tackled the ungrateful task to devote himself to an helping organisation against the misery in Germany. I can very well imagine that you must have been deeply depressed by the moral descent of our people. I think this is the most frightful terrible misery our country is suffering from today. All physical distress may be overcome but all that will be
in vain if our people doesn’t learn to find back to a clear distinction between good and evil and that we men ought to be brothers and to help each other. We must learn again the readiness and willingness to hear our neighbour and to accept him as a friend, we must regard him first as a man like ourselves and not in first regard as a French or English. Nations and states are institutions to serve mankind but men are not created for nations and political units. From this view all other questions play a second part and can easily be solved when this first point of growing together of mankind to a conscious unit has been achieved.

I said I can very well understand your concern about the desperate conditions within Germany. I think of your meeting with your Hamburger friend. But what I must tell you is that there are many many young people within our country even now who heard you and understand you and surely will do their best to lend a helping hand to a recovering of Germany in the way really needed. Perhaps more as you think your short visit and your work has had a great effect in the minds of our young people. It is a heart-lifting feeling to hear such views from abroad like yours and when seeing that such people exist and speak and make their efforts one suddenly finds back one’s courage and gets the energy for new working. And that’s for what I and many other people must thank you, that you have sent us a new sun-beam into our dark life. Just in such a hard time one feels once more as grateful for a little help and an understanding word. Certainly there are many men in Germany who feel like I do and in spite of our little number we’ll do our best in helping to lead our people back to the right way, and that we shall only find when giving up all egoistic planning and coming to repentance and to a consciousness of our guilt. We shall have a hard work that’s true, but I’m convinced there will always be a helping hand with us and give us back our energy when we are going to get tired. You and your honest words, the work of your organisation, other ones like the Friends, the Red Cross and “Care,” have brought us so much relief and new vitality to us that many of us have found back their hope. But I think if we have realised what is needed we’ll join together and do our work to give us and the world a future. Without intending to stress my own person I dare say that we who know our task have to be the “salt of the world” in order to give our people back joy and hope.

I, the writer of this letter, am a young student and live in the vicinity of Duesseldorf. I by no means write this letter to you to get any advantages from you and you’ll certainly understand me,
though during my terms at Bonn I'm living under rather hard conditions. I made the experience that if one has got a definite task and work one gets easier over the hardships of life. I can fully understand what you said about the nightmare that when one has got through times of trouble and hard working one looks back on it with quite other eyes than seeing it when living in it. And so it will be when we shall have overcome these present days.

In closing I formally wish a good working for you and your movement.

God bless you.

In gratefulness yours,

Wolfgang ———.

P.S.—Please excuse mistakes in my letter but I cannot express myself so well in English.
II

PRISONERS OF WAR

Mr. Attlee’s reply to the Memorial praying for a speedier repatriation of prisoners of war is a profoundly disturbing document. I forget who it was who said that hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. There is no hypocrisy, I am afraid, in Mr. Attlee’s letter. It says quite explicitly that we are retaining the labour of these men for the selfish needs of our own economy.

Mr. Attlee excuses our action by saying that prisoner-of-war labour is one of the only practical means by which “Germany” can make any practical reparation for the havoc she has wrought in so many parts of Europe. The question of reparation is an admittedly difficult one. For my own part I deprecate forced reparation of any kind: the only reparation worth having—and, incidentally, the only reparation that is healthy in point of crude economics—is the reparation which a conquered country, treated with justice and mercy by its conqueror, willingly makes out of its reviving prosperity. It is also, if Mr. Attlee will forgive me for saying so, nonsense to suggest that little reparation has been, is being, or will be made except by the labour of these prisoners. Has he forgotten, for instance, the German industrial processes and trade secrets which have been forcibly acquired under the “T-force” procedure, or the factories which have been or are being dismantled, or the many hundreds of others the imminent dismantling of which may have been announced before this pamphlet appears? If Mr. Attlee has forgotten these things, I can assure him that no German has.

But even on Mr. Attlee’s own ground, shaky as it is, how can our action be defended? If “Germany” has sinned, then “Germany,” on the current theory which is not mine, must be forced to make reparation. You cannot have it both ways: you cannot make use of the collective theory when it suits you, and abandon it when it does not. I say nothing of mercy: but the forced retention of these men sins lamentably against an earlier and more commonly regarded law, the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. How, as a matter of the most primitive justice, can it be right specially to penalise a man for the wholly irrelevant reason that we happened to capture him? Mr. Attlee knows the answer every bit as well as I do: but there is something in the modern political climate—is this Hitler’s victory?—that corrupts a man even as good as he.
There is a further point. Mr. Attlee says that it is only by prisoners' labour that practical reparation can be made for the devastation that "Germany" has wrought in Europe. Very well then: the labour should be employed, as the Manchester Guardian has pointed out, in those parts of Europe which have actually been devastated. The claim of Poland, in this connection, would appear to be superior to ours.

The fact is, and I am sorry to have to say it, that Mr. Attlee's apologia boils down to a restatement of "what we have we hold" in a new and peculiarly immoral form. What he is really saying is simply this: We have these men in our power: never mind how we happened to get hold of them: here they are, nobody can do anything about it, and we are going to use them for just as long as we want and for our own material ends.

I wrote a little book, some fifteen months ago, called "Our Threatened Values." I was horrified then at the growing contempt for everything that I had been brought up to hold in honour, and I was particularly grieved by the many indications that the Labour Party, in which I had placed so much hope, was failing to lead the world in that moral revival which alone can save us from the impending—I mean the essential, the spiritual—catastrophe. When the book was published a cynical reviewer remarked that I was wasting my time: the values were not threatened, he said, they had gone. God forbid that he should be right: but sometimes, now, I find myself wondering. The world is closing in: everywhere you hear the language of national self-interest and economic particularism. We talk about the maintenance of our living standards as if it were a moral imperative; we speak of fighting for markets in the language men once used about their religion. And, I must repeat to my own dismay, it is the heirs of Keir Hardie and Morris, or the heirs, if you prefer, of "Workers of the world, unite!", who are now—and how eagerly we looked forward to the day!—who are now at the national helm.

There are I don't know how many million human beings in the world; and a quarter of a million or so prisoners, though each one of them is a living soul, are no doubt a small and almost negligible percentage of the total. But there is something symbolic about the retention of these men, and about the plea with which Mr. Attlee justifies it. They show that we are putting self-interest before morality, material things before spiritual, national advantage before international community. That is not consistent with the English greatness of which Mr. Bevin is so
fond of speaking. I flew back from Germany the other day, and we arrived over London by night. I have seen the sun rise behind the Giotto Tower at Florence, and thought then that I should never live to see anything more beautiful. But I was wrong: the lights of our capital city, softened by the distance as they stretched to the horizon and purged of any evil, seemed, I suppose by some mechanism of human association, beautiful beyond compare. It is at a moment such as this that men know what their country means to them, and cannot bear that she should act unworthily.
NOTE

I thank the editors of the Manchester Guardian, the Observer and the Friend for permission to reprint material contributed to their columns.

V.G

Brimpton, Berkshire, September 13th, 1947.